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EDITORIAL

“PREDIGESTED” VERSUS “SOCIALIZED” COURSES

As evidenced more and more in recent articles and addresses, some impatience is developing between defenders of high-school reading courses in “classics” and advocates of high-school reading courses in “modern literature,” especially fiction, on the familiar grounds that the first lacks interest and the second value. But wherefore these internal dissensions when all forces and energies should be combined against error approaching from without, and threatening the utter destruction of all reading of literature because it isn’t “practical” or “vocational” or whatever it ought to be to increase the dollar-earning capacity of the reader! In every dispute between the well-meaning there is usually a middle way that is also the right way upon which both parties to the controversy may agree.

Why should not a high-school reading course begin with “modern literature, especially fiction,” for the sufficient reason that the members of the class are reading fiction already and enjoying it? Why should they not, then, be led to discover differences between works of fiction, and that some are more enjoyable and in certain respects “better” than others? (Words in quotation marks are words which everybody uses and no two persons use with the same meaning.) Why should they not develop a desire to discover for themselves why some books are supposed to be better than others; and why should they not themselves elect at least some of the books to be examined, if not all of them? Why should not this desire presently lead them to examine books that are not fiction, and even books that are commonly called “classics,” if only to determine why they are so called, and whether or not they really have any claim to consideration because of interest or quality? Under wise and sympathetic leadership, may not a class easily be brought to shape for itself a much stronger and more systematic course than anybody would

dare to "prescribe" for it, provided only that it does not "have" to take it?

Is it not as fair to question the wisdom of the traditional practice of forcing a class over a predetermined reading course as it is to question the sanity of letting it read what it pleases without direction or suggestion? Will not any class readily respond to sympathetic counsel if allowed to exercise its own volition in acting upon it? If requested to co-operate in making its own reading course, the desired ends fully explained and inevitable variations in taste allowed for, will it not gladly enter into experiments just to see how they will work out, even perhaps to making gingerly examination of a "Speech on Conciliation"? Will not every member of it join heartily in the community effort to test, broaden, improve its own literary appreciation and understanding, and will it not find many things good even though they used to be on the "required" list, and likable because nobody is trying either to coax or compel liking? Best of all, will not every member of that class have developed initiative, confidence, and strength?

A predetermined dietetic or literary curriculum, however absolutely and scientifically correct it may be for the average human being, cannot often, if ever, be the best for any individual, because there is no such thing as an "average" individual. Neither is it healthful for the individual to be guided solely by the promptings of casual or disordered appetite. The thing for him to do is to study the philosophy of diet and in accordance with it to be willing to try at least once anything recommended, and so to find out what really is good for him. If he is young enough will he not enjoy the experimenting if judiciously directed? When he does find out what is good for him will he not almost infallibly "like it": and in the process of finding out will he not acquire power, taste, and initiative that will safeguard him and others all his life? Isn't this the end of education, in diet, literature, and all other matters whatsoever?

E. M. H.